

Liberator-Hero Comparison Essay

Your Goal: Compare the way that two "liberator hero" personalities from the late 18th and early 19th century revolutions are perceived after their death.

Have one of them be either Marat (France) or Washington (United States) and the other be L'Overture (Haiti) or Bolivar (South America). Consider how they are portrayed in eulogies (funeral speeches) and in art. You can also discuss to what extent are they portrayed in connection to enlightenment ideas and how the basic history of their life compares to the way that they are perceived after they die. Do you think they are made into "liberator heroes" before or after their death?

Readings:

Background Reading Packet - This is from a book called Discovering the Global Past by Merry E. Wiesner. Consider this a required textbook reading for these four events. But you may also be able to use it to understand the people who you are comparing.

Readings on Individual Figures - Each of the four individuals has a eulogy (funeral speech) and an artistic portrayal. These documents for the two people who choose to compare should be the main thing you are comparing.

Format

Five paragraph persuasive essay.

- Paragraph 1: Introduce your main points of comparison?
- Paragraph 2-4: Supporting paragraphs. Have each paragraph relate to a specific similarity or difference and give supporting explanation and evidence.
- Paragraph 5: Summarize what you just said in a different way and the broader significance.

Feel free to quote or refer to the documents if necessary. If referring to the background packet just cite it as Wiesner and give a page number. If citing the funeral speech or painting cite the creator of those from the packet.

The final product can be nicely hand written or typed. No other outside sources should be used for this exercise.

Due Date: _____

BACKGROUND

In Britain's North American colonies, a struggle for home rule evolved into a war for separation. In the 1760s and early 1770s an increasing number of people in Britain's North American colonies began to oppose taxation by the mother country, as well as what they feared was an erosion of their political rights. In 1775 these protests erupted into open warfare, and in the

next year the colonies declared their independence from Great Britain and their intention to form a new nation. Independence and nationhood, however, were not actually achieved until the British gave up the armed struggle in 1781 and grudgingly recognized the former colonies' independence in 1783. For their part, the colonial elites who had led the fight for independence (New England and Middle Colonies merchants and lawyers and southern planters) did not want the war to be

accompanied by democratic reforms, and were able to prevent such an upsurge by forming a new government that favored rule by the elite, property qualifications for voting, and other conservative measures.

After the opening battles of what would become the American Revolution (at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, later referred to by Ralph Waldo Emerson as "the shot heard 'round the world"), revolutionary leaders in Britain's North American colonies³ realized they needed a military leader who could organize the ragtag militia besieging the British forces in Boston into what would become the Continental Army. Reasoning that a man from the southern colonies would give the rebellion the unity it needed, Congress named forty-three-year-old George Washington of Virginia. Washington was born on February 11, 1732,⁴ into Virginia's minor gentry. Trained as a surveyor, as a young man his goal was a commission in the regular British army. The intercession of a friend secured Washington an officership in the Virginia militia and the potentially dangerous assignment (at the age of only twenty-one) of delivering to the French, poised along the western frontier, an ultima-

tum to leave what Virginians believed was British territory. The following year (1754), Washington, now a colonel in the militia, returned to the frontier to challenge the French, but he was forced to surrender a fort he had constructed (Fort Necessity, in present-day western Pennsylvania) and to return to eastern Virginia.

In 1755 Washington became an aide to General Edward Braddock, who led a force of 1,400 British regulars and 450 colonial militiamen on an expedition to capture Fort Duquesne (present-day Pittsburgh) in western Pennsylvania. About eight miles below the fort, the army was attacked and defeated by a combined force of Frenchmen and Native Americans. Braddock was mortally wounded, and Washington led the remnant of the force to safety, an accomplishment that earned him an international reputation. But in 1758, frustrated by his inability to secure a commission in the British army as well as by insufficient support for the Virginia militia's campaign in the West, he resigned his militia post and retired to his home, Mount Vernon.

Although not in the forefront of colonial leaders who urged resistance to the mother country, Washington was so well known that he was elected to most of the major colonial congresses that met to protest British policies and, as noted above, was a popular choice to command the American army formed after the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord.

George Washington's principal accomplishments were organizing what became the United States Army (called the Continental Line and never numbering more than 18,000 troops); preventing desertions from decimating that

3. Canada was invited to join Britain's thirteen other North American colonies in the rebellion, but refused. See Justin H. Smith, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony: Canada and the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907). See also George A. Rawlyk, *Revolution Rejected, 1775-1776* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

4. When the English changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, eleven days were added to the calendar to realign it with the sun and stars. Therefore, Washington's birthday became February 22.

force (he once wrote, "We shall have to detach half of the army to look for the other half"); and keeping that force in the field for six years of skirmishes and battles, many of which were lost. The British, however, faced with the defeat of General Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781 and mounting opposition to the war at home, were forced to give up the struggle. After once again retiring to Mount Vernon, Washington was called back to service as the Constitutional government's first president (the article of the Constitution dealing with the executive branch was written with Washington in mind, in the hope that he would accept the position). Having retired yet again in 1797, he died on December 14, 1799. By then, he was generally being referred to as the "father of his country," and was enshrined as the liberator-hero of the United States, the symbol of the successful American Revolution.

The French Revolution was the result of the convergence of several problems that overtook the French monarchy in the 1780s. The most critical of these problems was the government's fiscal bankruptcy. As a consequence of the costly wars of the eighteenth century and a system of taxation that virtually exempted the nobility and the clergy from fiscal obligations, the French monarchy was deeply in debt by 1787.⁵ Several finance ministers struggled with the crown's debts (which by 1788 had reached 4 billion livres and took 51 percent of the government's

total revenues just to make the interest payments), but eventually all of them arrived at the same conclusion: Bankruptcy could be avoided only through fundamental reforms that would tax the Church and nobility and not just the commoners.

In proposing such changes, however, the finance ministers encountered opposition from the noble judges of the great law courts (the *parlements*), who had to approve any new royal laws before they could be enforced. Such basic changes in taxation policy, these judges alleged, had to be approved by a nationwide representative body, and their objections forced the king to call for a meeting in 1789 of the Estates General, an elected assembly that had not met since 1614.

The election of 1789 was held in a country suffering from enormous economic problems. Since 1705 France's population had increased by 24.5 percent, with no corresponding increase in the food supply. Poor harvests in 1788 and 1789 and a commercial depression in 1789 only made matters worse. Inflation of prices had increased the cost of living for the working person by 62 percent over the eighteenth century, while wages for construction workers had risen only 24 percent and agricultural workers' wages a meager 16 percent. Nearly 40 percent of France's population in 1789 was destitute, living by squatting on land they did not own, begging, charity, or crime.

The result of France's economic and political problems was the election of an Estates General that was prepared to seek far more than tax reform. When Louis XVI refused to approve voting rules for the Estates General that would have assured the representatives of the

5. France's successful intervention in the American Revolution had cost the French government 2 billion livres, a figure that was four times the government's tax receipts in 1788.

commoners (known as the Third Estate) a chance at enacting tax reform and of realizing some degree of political equality with the clergy and the nobility (the First and Second Estates), the king encountered the first act of revolution. Declaring themselves a National Assembly and the rightful representatives of all the French people, the representatives of the Third Estate pledged to draft a written constitution that would clearly limit royal authority—in essence making Louis XVI a constitutional monarch. When the king countered by ordering troops to disperse the National Assembly, the people of Paris took up arms and seized the Bastille, a strategically important fort and prison, on July 14, 1789. In the countryside, peasants attacked the castles and manor houses of their noble lords and broke into grain storage facilities.

Faced with mounting opposition and rising violence, Louis XVI ostensibly agreed to live within a new constitutional order. Taking the king at his word, the National Assembly began work on a constitution that would have made France a constitutional monarchy. But Louis never really accepted the new constitutional order, and in 1791 he attempted to flee to eastern France to assume leadership of counterrevolutionary forces. Captured and forcibly returned to Paris, where he was virtually made a prisoner in his own country, Louis's situation was hopeless. In September 1792, the republic was proclaimed, Louis XVI was tried for treason and condemned in December 1792, and the monarch went to the guillotine on January 16, 1793. His wife Marie Antoinette (who probably never said, "Let them eat cake") followed soon

thereafter, and their son, next in line to the now nonexistent throne, died in prison in 1795.

Jean-Paul Marat was among the Jacobin radicals who were supported by the shopkeepers and craftsmen of Paris, known as *sans-culottes*,⁶ in their regicide⁷ and their search for other enemies of the revolution. Marat was born on May 24, 1743, the oldest of six children in a lower-middle-class family (the family's original name had been Mara, but Jean-Paul changed his name to appear more French). Later admitting that his dominant passion was a love of glory (*amour de la gloire*), Marat became a prosperous physician who treated the wealthy and published his research on the medical properties of electricity. His friends called him a brilliant doctor-scientist-philosopher, while his detractors dubbed him a desperate charlatan. Drifting toward radicalism (driven, perhaps, by the rejection of his bid for admission to the Academy of Sciences), in February 1789 Marat published an attack on the government, calling for a constitutional monarchy with full political rights to the people. In September 1789, he began to publish his newspaper *L'Ami du Peuple* (*The Friend of the People*).

6. *sans-culottes* (without breeches): the shopkeepers and craftsmen of Paris, so named because they wore clothing characteristic of their social group. Their garb included pants that extended to their shoe tops, not the elegant knee breeches of aristocrats. This group was unified by more than just a common mode of dress, however. It espoused a political ideology of direct democracy and an economic policy of government regulation of wages and prices to protect its economic security.

7. regicide: the killing of a king.

From the first, *L'Ami du Peuple* echoed Marat's fears of plots against the Revolution by its enemies, and his responses to such plots became increasingly radical. As early as October 1789 he called for a revolutionary dictatorship that would preserve the Revolution's gains. One month earlier, Marat had declared that "five or six hundred heads cut off would have assured you peace, liberty and happiness." But by May 27, 1791, he had raised that number: "Today fifty thousand would be necessary" to protect the Revolution. Seen by his opponents as a dangerous radical and blamed by the police for instigating an October 1789 march on the royal palace at Versailles, Marat was forced into hiding and fled briefly to England, but he soon returned to France. Continuing to publish his newspaper, Marat gained more power when he was elected to the National Convention in 1792.

Marat supported *sans-culottes* ideals of direct democracy, aid to the economically disadvantaged funded by a progressive income tax, state-sponsored vocational schools, and shorter terms of military service. These positions won him the support of the Parisian *sans-culottes* and the enmity of the more moderate Girondin faction in the Convention. Indeed, the Girondins secured Marat's indictment on charges of inciting insurrection, but he was acquitted of these capital charges and gained his revenge by playing a major role in the Parisian insurrection that purged the Convention of its Girondin members on June 2, 1793.

After June 2, 1793, Marat was much less active politically. He was dying from skin and lung diseases, and was forced to spend long hours in medi-

cal baths in his Paris apartment. It was there that he was visited by a young woman named Charlotte Corday on July 13, 1793. Corday was a Girondist sympathizer who had become convinced that radicals like Marat were destroying the Revolution. Gaining admission to Marat's bathroom by claiming to have information on counterrevolutionary plots, she stabbed the revolutionary leader to death. Apprehended immediately, the twenty-five-year-old Corday was guillotined on July 17. A magnificent funeral and numerous eulogies turned Jean-Paul Marat into a revolutionary martyr and a liberator-hero. The ceremonies would have lasted longer, but, in the hot Paris summer, Marat's body began to decompose. His embalmed heart was hung from the ceiling of the Cordeliers Club, but the remainder of Marat was quickly buried in the club's garden.

The search for enemies of the revolution led to the Reign of Terror of 1793-1794, in which perhaps as many as 40,000 citizens lost their lives. And their search for a secular state in which the Church would have no influence led the radicals to scrap the traditional calendar based on the Christian year in favor of a new revolutionary calendar that began counting years from 1791, when the new constitution came into force.

True stability, however, continued to elude France. Recurrent coups marked the rest of the decade until Napoleon Bonaparte's seizure of power in 1799 restored some measure of political stability.

Christopher Columbus had landed on the island he named Hispaniola (Little

Spain) on December 6, 1492, and he claimed it for Spain.⁸ French settlers began moving into the western part of the island in the late 1600s, and the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) officially divided the island between the two European nations, the French calling their portion Saint-Domingue and the Spanish calling theirs Santo Domingo. Gradually the French developed a plantation system with approximately 3,000 plantations that raised sugar, coffee, cotton, and indigo. The Native American population, not immune to European diseases, was virtually wiped out. The French planters, therefore, relied on slave labor from Africa, importing over 800,000 Africans between 1680 and 1776. By 1787, the population of Saint-Domingue was composed of around 24,000 whites, 408,000 black slaves (approximately two-thirds of whom were African born, largely from the Congo and Angola), and 20,000 *gens de couleur* (mulattos and free blacks).

The death toll among the slave population was enormous; thus planters had to import Africans continuously to keep up the labor pool. Largely because a significant majority of the slave population had been born in freedom in Africa, slave resistance was a regular feature of life in the French colony. A large revolt took place in 1522, and four other armed conspiracies occurred between 1679 and 1704. Runaway slaves hid in the mountains, where, according to one European observer in 1705,

"[t]hey gather together in the woods and live there exempt from service to their masters without any other leader but one elected among them." African culture among the slaves and runaways remained both vital and durable, including the practice of voodoo, an African form of worship that the French tried in vain to eradicate but that formed an important bond among the blacks—even those who had nominally been converted to the Catholic faith. In 1757 another widespread rebellion, the Makandal conspiracy, broke out. Involving mostly African-born slaves, it sought to overthrow the white masters and win political independence. Crushed by the white planters, the conspirators were burned at the stake.

The French Revolution provided the opportunity for another revolt. Aware of revolutionary events in France, in 1791 mulattos sent a delegation to the National Assembly in Paris to secure the rights enumerated in France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). Being refused, mulattos rebelled against the white planters but were quickly overcome, as they had been in an earlier revolt in October 1790. Leaders of the uprising were executed and then decapitated, their heads placed on poles which were left standing for around three years as a warning to other would-be revolutionaries.

Once again, however, the French Revolution intruded on life in Saint-Domingue. Later in 1791, the National Assembly granted rights to all mulattos and all blacks born of free parents. When news of the National Assembly's actions reached the Caribbean colony (on June 30, 1791), whites were enraged.

8. The origin of the name *Haiti* is somewhat unclear. Many scholars believe that the Native American Arawaks who were living on the island when Columbus arrived called the island *Haiti*. But other scholars of the region disagree.

Civil war once again broke out between mulattos and whites.

In August 1791, the situation was made even more complex—and bloody—by an uprising of the slaves. Many whites fled to U.S. seaports like Savannah, Charleston, and Baltimore, terrifying American plantation owners with reports of burning plantations, widespread killing, and atrocities. By 1793, slaves had built up an army of between 4,000 and 5,000 troops who were fierce, courageous, and tactically brilliant fighters. Led by Toussaint Louverture, this army beat back an attempted British invasion, a Spanish intrusion from Santo Domingo, and another uprising of mulattos in 1799.

François-Dominique Toussaint à Bréda was born on May 20, 1743, on the Bréda plantation in Saint-Domingue. The oldest of eight children, Toussaint's father had been born in Africa, captured in a war, and sold into slavery in the New World. Taught to read and write by a Roman Catholic priest, Toussaint was given more and more responsibility on the plantation until he was made coachman and livestock steward; the plantation's overseer (the owner lived in Paris) gave him forty acres and thirteen slaves to manage. Permitted to marry (a rarity for slaves in Saint-Domingue), Toussaint wed Suzanne Simone Baptiste, and the union produced two sons. Therefore, although Toussaint was technically a slave and no manumission papers ever were drawn up, essentially he was looked upon and treated as a free man (*affranchi*).

When the slave rebellion first broke out in August 1791, Toussaint played only a minor role and was believed to

be conservative in his thinking (he had helped his plantation's white factor, or agent, escape from a mob of ex-slaves). Gradually his powerful and articulate speeches to the troops (Toussaint spoke both the Creole patois and his father's African tribal language, in addition to French) and his charisma, tactical genius, and emphasis on training and discipline lifted him to the position of commander of the rebellion.

Seeing an opportunity to drive the French from Saint-Domingue, Toussaint briefly sided with the Spanish. It was at this time that he wrote a letter to blacks and signed it Toussaint Louverture, which means *the opening*. "I thought it was a good name for bravery," Toussaint reflected. But when he learned that the National Convention in Paris had abolished slavery (in February 1794), he switched sides and led his army against the Spanish and the British invaders, both of whom gave up the fight. In 1796 Toussaint was named lieutenant governor of Saint-Domingue, in 1800 he put down an uprising of the mulattos, and in 1801 he issued a constitution for the republic.

And yet Toussaint believed that Haiti's economic future was tied to that of France. In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte revived French ambitions for an empire in the Western Hemisphere. Intending to reap enormous profits from the sugar and coffee trade and determined to restore slavery in order to do it, Napoleon sent a French invading army to the island in 1802. When the French army invaded the island in 1802, Toussaint, foolishly, was prepared to welcome it. His two sons were being educated in France (they were received by the Empress Josephine) and he had

tried to convince the ex-slaves to adopt French ways (he criticized the low necklines of Haitian women's dresses).

Tricked into surrendering, Toussaint was hustled off to a prison in France (Fort de Joux), where he died on April 7, 1803. His entreaties to meet with Napoleon had gone unheeded. Yet the Haitians ultimately won their independence from the French, and Toussaint Louverture became the symbol of the revolution, the liberator-hero.

The French army, decimated by yellow fever, was forced to withdraw from Haiti, ending Napoleon's dreams of an American empire. It was at that point that he offered to sell the Louisiana Territory to the United States. The Republic of Haiti (so named in 1804) had secured its independence, but the instability and terror of the revolution did not cease for decades.

In Spain's other Latin American⁹ colonies, the struggles for independence, like those of Britain's North American colonies,¹⁰ were led not from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder but from the top. In the late eighteenth century, Spain's monarch Charles III attempted to assert more direct control over the colonies, in part by filling the colonial bureaucracies with *peninsulares*, people who had been born in Spain and were sent out to enforce

royal proclamations, streamline tax collection, and reassert direct royal authority over Spain's American possessions. This angered the *creoles*, whites of European descent who had been born in America and who believed that they, not the *peninsulares*, should be awarded those high administrative posts. Yet their complaints were ignored in Madrid: of the 107 viceroys appointed by the Crown during the colonial era, only four were *creoles*.¹¹

Although the *creoles* and others had been restive for some time, the 1807-1808 invasion of Spain by Napoleon Bonaparte and his toppling of the Spanish king (he placed his brother Jerome on the throne)¹² gave the conspirators the opportunity they needed to overthrow European rule. Fearing that Napoleon would exercise more power in America than had the weak Spanish government, that he would increase taxes to finance his military ventures, and that he would attempt to export the ideology of the French Revolution (especially that of *egalité*), many *creoles* organized small councils or committees known as *juntas* that claimed to be the legitimate governing bodies of various regions of Latin America.

And yet, it was by no means clear what path Spain's colonies should take. Many *creoles* viewed the unstable situation as a chance to cast off the monarchy altogether in favor of complete independence. In contrast, other

9. The term *Latin America* was not used until 1856. See Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

10. The thirteen British colonies that did revolt tried to get Canada to join them, but they were rebuffed. See Justin H. Smith, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony: Canada and the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907).

11. Richard W. Slatta and Jane Lucas DeGrummond, *Simón Bolívar's Quest for Glory* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003), p. 48.

12. Napoleon forced King Charles IV to abdicate and then did the same to his son Ferdinand VII. When Napoleon deposed his brother, he restored Ferdinand to the Spanish throne.

powerful forces (the most prominent of which were the *peninsulares*) clung to the Spanish monarchy (which Napoleon restored in 1814) from which they derived their wealth and authority. Thus when fighting erupted between the two sides (one known as Royalists and the other calling themselves Patriots), the wars of independence in Latin America took on the character of civil wars rather than uprisings against a mother country.

One of the principal leaders who emerged in Latin America's wars of independence was Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), called by some “the Liberator.” Born to one of the wealthiest families in Venezuela and “one of the most aristocratic in America,”¹³ young Simón studied in Europe, was presented at the Spanish court, and in 1802 (at the age of nineteen) married a Spanish noblewoman. When his wife died in Venezuela the next year, Simón returned to Europe. Later he recalled, “The death of my wife put me on the road to politics very early; it made me follow the chariot of Mars instead of . . . the plow of Ceres.”¹⁴ He never remarried.

Returning to Venezuela in 1807, Bolívar helped to organize a *junta* in Caracas (he referred to it as a “literary group”) that met in his home, and he was a delegate to the first Congress of Venezuela, which on July 4, 1811, voted for independence from Spain. By that time armed conflict had broken out between the Royalists and the Patriots, and Bolívar became the leader of the

Patriot forces. A self-taught military commander, Bolívar directed over five hundred battles, in some of which his forces fell victim to his rashness and impetuosity. In the end, however, his charisma kept his armies together, and on December 9, 1824, at the Battle of Ayacucho, his troops smashed the Royalist army and as a result ended Spain's efforts to reestablish its American empire. Thus Simón Bolívar played a major role in liberating Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Upper Peru (later named Bolivia in his honor).

Although he was called “the Liberator,” Simón Bolívar certainly was no democrat. Although he often compared himself to George Washington, he believed that the United States's type of government would not work in Latin America, principally because roughly 90 percent of the population was illiterate and had no experience in political participation (he once quipped that he “would rather see his fellow Spanish Americans adopt the Koran . . . than the government of the United States”).¹⁵ Therefore, when he could he assumed dictatorial powers. As a result, several of his followers turned against him, and when he died of tuberculosis in 1830 at the age of forty-seven, he was waiting for a ship to carry him to exile in Europe. Soon afterward, however, his reputation was restored and he was honored as a genuine liberator-hero.

Thus each revolution—the American, the French, the Haitian, and the Latin

13. Slatta and DeGrummond, *Simón Bolívar's Quest for Glory*, p. 17.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 20. Mars was the Roman god of war, and Ceres was the Roman goddess of agriculture.

15. For Bolívar's remark about the Qur'an (Koran), see David Bushnell and Neill Macaulay, *The Emergence of Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 25.

Chapter 6

The Liberator-

Hero and

Western

Revolutions

(1770s–1810s)

American—chose a person who could stand as the symbol of its essence. Your task in this chapter is to analyze how each liberator-hero was portrayed by his contemporaries, through eulogies

and portraits, and how each portrayal informs us about the nature of each of the momentous revolutions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.